



The President's Daily Brief

January 17, 1976

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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At Annex we present an assessment of the significance of the military collapse of the National Front for the Liberation of Angola.

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Palestinian Refugee Camps



LEBANON

The Asad-Franjiyah meeting, originally set for today, has been put off until steps have been taken to halt the dangerous escalation in fighting. To underscore the Syrians' sense of urgency, President Asad sent his chief of staff to Beirut yesterday to bolster Prime Minister Karami's efforts to arrange another ceasefire.

The Christians are insisting on a reduction in the fighting before opening negotiations, but this may be only a tough negotiating tactic or an effort to delay serious negotiations while they seek to consolidate their military gains in the area of the refugee camps. The result of President Franjiyah's consultations with Maronite, Greek Orthodox, and Greek Catholic leaders clearly suggests that whenever he and Asad do meet, Franjiyah will insist first and foremost on discussing the Lebanese-Palestinian problem rather than the Muslims' demands for political and economic reforms.

Moderates on both sides as well as the Syrians, however, apparently recognize the urgent need to defuse the present situation because of the larger, more open involvement of both the Palestinians and Lebanese armed forces on opposing sides.

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Meanwhile, there was no let-up in the fighting in the north around Tripoli and Zagharta or east of Beirut around Zahlah. In the capital, Phalangist and other Christian positions in the commercial and hotel districts were becoming more precarious as a result of the combined leftist-Palestinian counter-attack to relieve the pressure on the two besieged refugee camps, Tall Zatar and Jisar al-Basha. The Palestinians claimed late yesterday that they had captured the headquarters of the Phalangists and National Liberals' militia in that area.

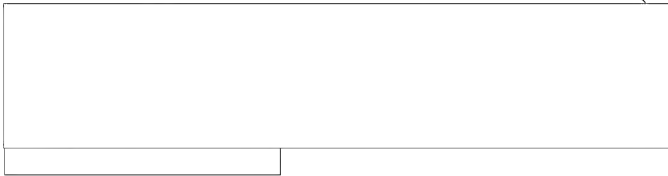
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PLO chief Yasir Arafat probably is under increasing pressure to commit more of his forces to avert a repetition of the Palestinian rout in Jordan in 1970. A large portion of the Palestinian forces in northern and central Lebanon probably is already involved in the fighting. Despite his reluctance to become more heavily involved during the UN Security Council debate, Arafat may commit more of his forces in southern Lebanon, as he did yesterday to reinforce Damour. He is likely, however, to resist uncovering the Palestinians' southern flank.

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There are no military indications of Egyptian preparations to intervene. Activity of the Egyptian armed forces appears to be normal. President Sadat and Foreign Minister Fahmi both have reiterated within recent days their view that neither Arab nor other foreign intervention would solve the Lebanese problem.

CUBA-ANGOLA

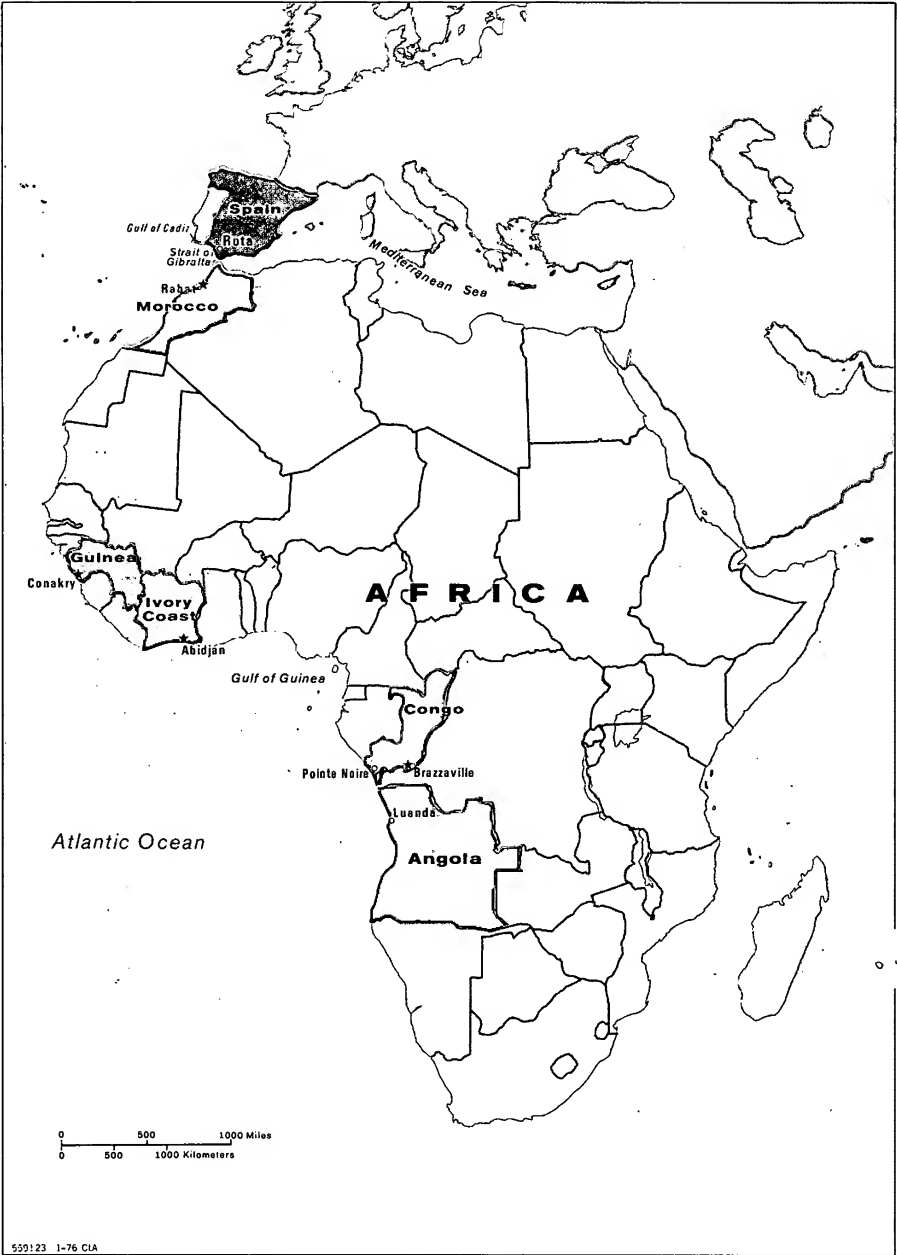
Havana's decision to continue its buildup in Angola beyond 1,000 troops may have been a Cuban initiative only belatedly accepted by the Soviets.

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This is the first assertion we have seen that the Cubans took the initiative in expanding their combat force in Angola, or that the Soviets had qualms about the buildup. We have assumed--and still do--that substantial Cuban combat forces originally entered the conflict at Soviet behest. It would appear, however, that the heavy buildup that followed may have resulted from Cuba's assessment that more combat personnel were necessary to protect and capitalize on its initial investment of troops.

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We cannot confirm these casualty figures and suspect they are exaggerated. Nevertheless, Cuba's losses so far probably have been higher than Havana expected, which would explain the government's reluctance to provide the Cuban people with any details of the role Cuban troops are playing in the war.



USSR

There has been little change in the status of Soviet ships in the western Mediterranean and West African waters since yesterday.

One change is impending--the movement of the Kresta-II-class cruiser from the vicinity of Conakry to a rendezvous with the landing ship currently south of Ivory Coast. We do not know when or where this will take place. The cruiser is probably off Conakry in company with the Kotlin-class destroyer that has been in the area for several days.

The Sverdlov cruiser has remained just inside the Strait of Gibraltar since yesterday. It is still being accompanied by two F-class submarines.

[REDACTED] The cruiser's brief trip through the Strait of Gibraltar and back suggests that Moscow may have changed its original orders to the cruiser, whatever these were.

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Meanwhile, the Kashin-class destroyer which arrived in the Gulf of Cadiz on January 11 is still there. It has begun to shadow the US carrier group due to arrive in Rota later today.

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NOTES

An article on China in Pravda yesterday--the most authoritative Soviet commentary on China since Chou En-lai's death and the release of the Soviet helicopter crew--took a very critical line on Mao and studiously avoided any conciliatory note.

The main theme, although not a new one, was that it is Mao and his "henchmen" who stand in the way of better relations between the two countries. The article, however, mentions that there are Chinese "patriots" who oppose Mao's policies--an unusually explicit reference to the possible existence of individuals or factions within China who advocate less hostile relations with the USSR.

A specific reference to several anti-Soviet articles that have appeared recently in the Chinese press may be a warning to the Soviet people not to jump to any conclusions that the release of the helicopter crew means China's policy toward the Soviet Union has changed. It may also have been intended to put the Chinese on notice that they will have to tone down their rhetoric before they can expect any reciprocal gesture from Moscow.

* * *

Panamanian leader General Torrijos' behavior during his visit to Cuba from January 10 to 15 and the final, mildly worded communiqué demonstrated considerable concern for US sensitivities and the prospects for eventual ratification of a new canal treaty.

The communiqué skirted delicate topics with general statements supporting self-determination, territorial integrity, and anticolonialism. Torrijos did receive enthusiastic support from Castro for Panama's effort to reassert sovereignty over the canal. In speeches during the visit, however, both leaders stressed the need for Panama to negotiate calmly with the US, and both noted the differences between the Panamanian and Cuban experiences. Castro held his news conference--at which Angola and US relations were raised--after Torrijos' plane departed, possibly in deference to the Panamanian's concern about avoiding such sensitive subjects during his visit.

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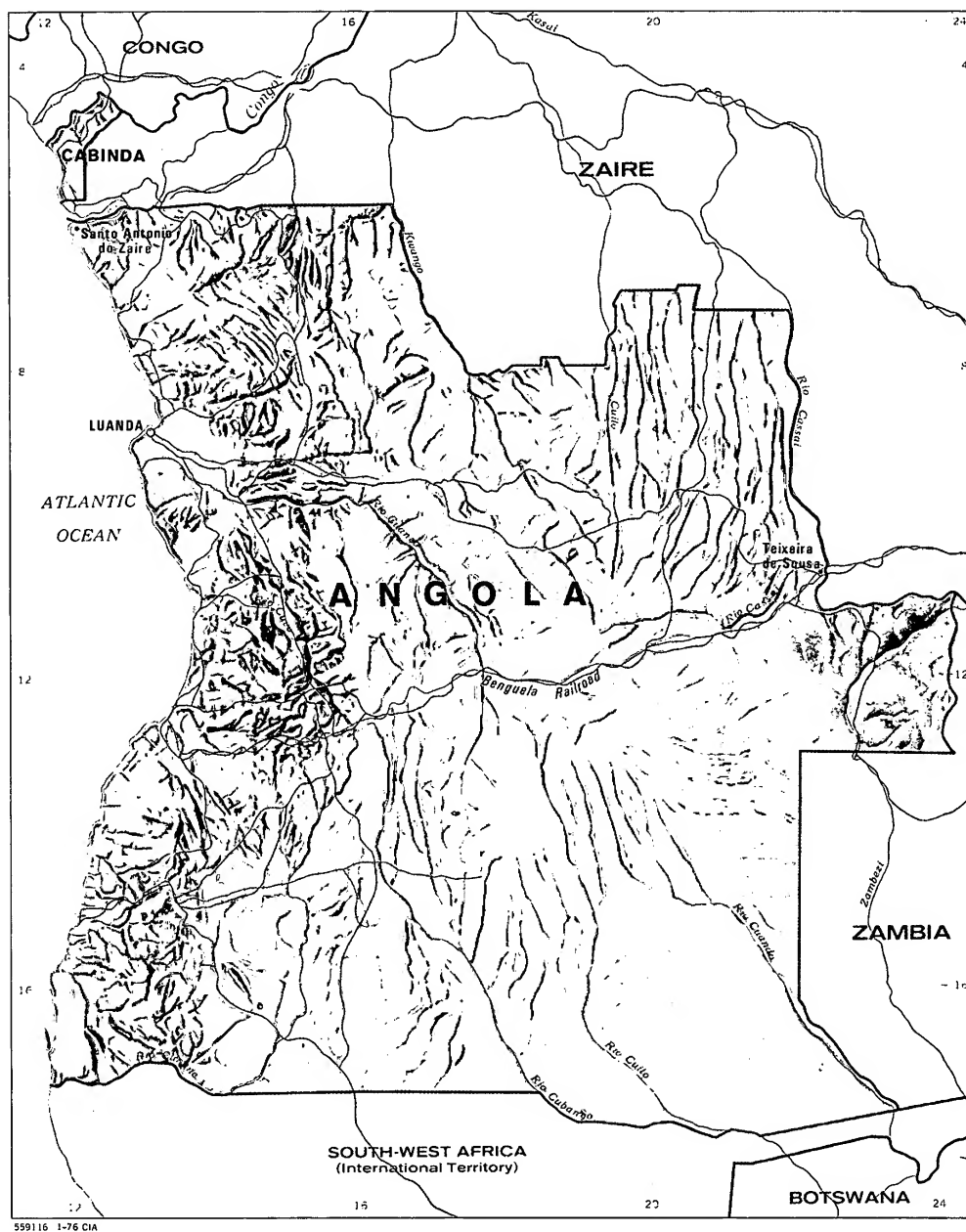
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Icelandic Prime Minister Hallgrimsson said yesterday that Reykjavik would postpone a break in relations with the UK for a week to allow Britain to withdraw its frigates from Icelandic waters.

The Icelandic delay is apparently a response to Foreign Secretary Callaghan's offer to withdraw all British vessels from Icelandic waters for one week in return for a pledge from Reykjavik to compromise on the size of the British annual catch. When talks broke off last November, Iceland refused to budge beyond 65,000 tons. London wanted a 110,000-ton figure but indicated a willingness to compromise. The breathing spell will give NATO Secretary General Luns an opportunity to confer with Callaghan next week.

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ANGOLA

The military collapse of the National Front is the first major turning point in the Angolan civil war since it began last summer. As such, it presents new options to the struggle's participants.

It is highly unlikely that the National Front will be able to regain its former military status in northern Angola as long as the Cubans continue to aid the Popular Movement. Given time to recuperate, however, the Front probably could maintain a low-level insurgency in the north as it did against the Portuguese.

Zaire

The National Front's collapse presents Zairian President Mobutu, the Front's major backer, with some hard choices of his own. He might be tempted to underwrite an insurgency in northern Angola, but he would have to give serious consideration to the consequences.

Zairian assistance to Front insurgent operations might invite retaliation in kind by the Popular Movement, possibly against Zaire's copper-producing region. The Movement has the allegiance of perhaps 4,000 exiled followers of the late Moise Tshombe's Katangan secessionist movement who have lived in Angola since the Katangan regime collapsed in 1963.

The Katangans have been fighting with the Popular Movement against the National Front. Even when the Portuguese controlled Angola, Mobutu viewed them as a potential threat, and a mere suggestion from the Popular Movement that they might be sent into Zaire may be enough for Mobutu to keep the National Front on a tight rein.

Moreover, Zaire's copper industry relies heavily on Angola's rail and port facilities, and Mobutu cannot jeopardize access to those facilities,

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particularly since Zaire's economy is in desperate straits. For Mobutu, then, there is little return in escalating his support for the National Front, and he may eventually tell Front president Holden Roberto that nothing more can be done.

The most realistic option open to Mobutu--who is a realist--is to strengthen his ties with the National Union, through whose tribal territory the currently severed Benguela railroad passes, and to support a political coalition between the National Union and the Popular Movement.

At the moment, however, Mobutu's most immediate concern is that the Angolan civil war has reached Zaire's border in two places--at Santo Antonio do Zaire in northwestern Angola and at Teixeira de Sousa in eastern Angola. The 1,000 or so Zairian troops who fought in Angola have been routed and have fled back to Zaire. Mobutu must have serious misgivings about the effectiveness of his army and may not want to commit Zairian troops to further fighting at this time, despite bellicose statements from Kinshasa that recent clashes between Popular Movement and Zairian forces at Teixeira de Sousa could lead to war.

The National Union

The National Front's collapse will quickly put new pressure on its military and political ally, the National Union. The alliance was always tenuous at best and did not fulfill its tactical goal of forcing the Popular Movement into a political compromise by squeezing its forces on two fronts. In essence the National Union regarded the Front's military capabilities with skepticism from the very beginning and for the most part conducted its own operations as if there were no alliance.

Nevertheless, the National Front's opposition to the Popular Movement in the north, however weak, served the National Union by tying up a good part of the Popular Movement's resources. Those resources can now be shifted to central and southern Angola.

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South Africa

Any escalation of military operations in central and southern Angola will present serious problems for South Africa. Pretoria already is giving substantial assistance to the National Union and probably has the resources to increase significantly its present levels of support. Pretoria cannot, however, hope to match the levels of assistance available to the Popular Movement from Cuba and the Soviet Union.

Moreover, although Pretoria has probably been encouraged by the failure of the Organization of African Unity to condemn its involvement in Angola, any sudden and dramatic build-up of the South African presence would only bring forth new efforts to condemn Pretoria.

South Africa ordered its troops to withdraw from active combat zones prior to the OAU summit. These forces appear to be sitting tight in defensive positions and have not returned to the front, suggesting that Pretoria has not yet agreed to any future South African participation. There seems to be no marked increase in the level of fighting in central and southern Angola between the National Union and the Popular Movement, although the Movement may be getting ready to push south. The National Union appears to be holding its own in the fighting that is taking place.

Political Options

The main question raised by the new military situation is whether or not the withdrawal of the National Front--historically the Popular Movement's main adversary--opens new approaches for a political settlement between the Popular Movement and the National Union. The National Union is on record in favor of a political compromise and would not be held back by its political alliance with the Front.

Publicly, the Popular Movement is proclaiming that the collapse of the National Front changes nothing and that it will continue to fight. A number of Popular Movement officials have pointed out, however, that a coalition with the National Union is possible if South African forces withdraw from Angola and National Union president Jonas Savimbi resigns.

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The fragmentary information we have suggests the Popular Movement is not a monolithic organization. Although the military hardliners in the organization will be encouraged by the collapse of the National Front to advocate a military solution, the organization's politicians might be sensitive to political pressures.

It is quite possible that African leaders, including a number of those who support the Popular Movement, may conclude that the Movement can now afford to be more flexible. These leaders may attempt to use whatever influence they have to resolve the Angolan problem politically.

The USSR

Moscow may also be looking at the possibility of a political solution in Angola. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the USSR is beginning to think seriously about the possibility of some sort of coalition in Angola. They made it clear that such a coalition should be weighted heavily in favor of the Popular Movement and be designed to enable the Movement to emerge eventually as the dominant force in Angola.

[REDACTED] moderate African states, which in the Soviet view are searching desperately for a way out of the Angolan impasse, might acquiesce in a virtual takeover by the Popular Movement in order to bring an end to the fighting.

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[REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] some proposal for a coalition may be forthcoming after Moscow finishes its assessment of the OAU session. Soviet press commentary on the OAU has thus far given little hint that a coalition would be acceptable to the USSR at the present time.

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Admittedly, however, it is still too early to discern any trends emerging from recent developments. Moreover, it is difficult to judge how much external pressure, if it is applied at all, will be needed to convince so individualistic a person as Agostinho Neto to accept a political compromise.

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